



THE ROLE OF THE ESTATES

FROM AGRICULTURE TO URBICULTURE

Large swathes of London's West End remain under the ownership of the Great Estates, with the Grosvenor Estate (Duke of Westminster) owning much of Mayfair and the Cadogan family (Earl of Cadogan) much of Chelsea. **Terry Farrell** looks at how this long-term custodianship has impacted on the development of the fabric of the city and its strong sense of place. He explains how it is a model that he has tried to draw from in his own Earl's Court masterplan.

Evolution, not revolution, is often stated as being the British way of change: piecemeal, progressive and not cohering to an overarching plan. London, in its assembly of towns and villages into an urban conglomerate, has grown and continues to grow, in this way. A collection of complementary interests, capital investments and the physical shaping force of topography have seen a shift in land use and development over the centuries, from agricultural land to a set of urban estates owned and managed by families and organisations with vested interests in the careful, considered and intelligent use of this most scarce of resources.

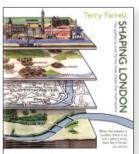
The oldest of the Great Estates, as they are collectively known, were once agricultural landholders, occupying the land between the royal estates of the Regent's Park to the north and St James's Park to the south. At Marylebone, the Howard de Walden Estate - which manages the high street and surrounding land - follows a pattern of settlement established in the medieval period. The river Tyburn, originating in Hampstead, formed the focal point for a series of small villages to develop along its banks, between the royal hunting grounds of Regent's Park and St James's. Adjacent to these settlements, on the lands to the west and east, between riverbeds, grew farm holdings that were to eventually gain a geometric field pattern and form the basis for 18th- and 19th-century estates to grow and develop into what we see today. Gradually, and in an evolutionary manner, following growth in population and the continuing expansion outwards of the metropolis, these estates became the cultivated urbanism of well-to-do London - completing the transition from agriculture to 'urbiculture'. Today, Marylebone High Road is still shaped by the Tyburn, hidden beneath its length in a deep culvert that, apocryphally, emerges through the basement of an antiques shop along the road.

Terry Farrell & Partners, The lost rivers of London and the historic districts of London that grew alongside them, 2010 Like the estates of west-central London, the land along the banks of, for example, the lost river 'Counters Creek' has made the progression from agriculture to urbiculture and, through urban stewardship, is being brought back as an established place in the city.

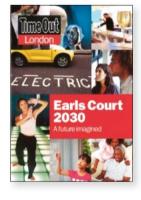
The large estates of Central London mostly followed this model of development, with inhabitation along London's tributaries gradually growing into established settlements. And here, within this model of long-term ownership, is an approach to the creation and management of city space based around an enlightened form of urban stewardship. Estates such as the Howard de Walden at Marylebone, the Portman, Cadogan and Grosvenor all follow similar patterns of development, but most importantly they share the same approach to a carefully developed land-holding that places the quality of the urban realm at the very fore. As custodians of the land for perpetuity, the estates can take a long-term and large-scale view of the development of their built environment. This is a very British approach to land-holding and we have seen extraordinary examples of its application overseas. As a colonial power, Britain imposed such a model on Hong Kong which led to the growth of one of the world's most successful economies. The Chinese have understood its value and assimilated it, making the Hong Kong model an internationally recognised way of providing exemplary urban stewardship over many decades. This model is different to that of the contemporary public sector in the UK which struggles with planning proactively in the same way. In today's economic climate, local authorities tend to see their land-holdings as assets to reduce fiscal debt and not for long-term value creation.

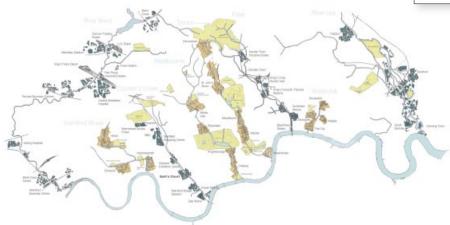
The estates do not function outside of the economics of our time, of course. Through an enlightened approach to working with the public sector in planning the future use of the land, the harsh realities of austerity can be mitigated by a long-term vision of an urban future. Currently in London we are seeing the continued growth of the estates model, not least of which can be seen in the progressive rejuvenation of previously overlooked

Cover of Sir Terry Farrell's Book, Shaping London: The Patterns and Forms that Make the Metropolis, 2010



The imaginary Time Out guide for Earls Court in the year 2030, commissioned by Capital & Counties, is an example of a landowner consulting in an innovative and proactive way on the future of their development.





areas of the capital. At Earl's Court, for example, investment and development company Capital and Counties Properties has worked closely with local communities to understand the current cultural and economic value of the area. This is a place with a thriving, but somewhat unknown, creative centre, a strong Australasian community and a successful business district; it needs careful consideration of its development potential over a long time period, which has been central to the engagement with local communities and stakeholders. Activities such as the imaginary Time Out guide to Earl's Court in the year 2030 and the myearlscourt.com website, which has been visited by over 25,000 people, are exemplary ways of engaging in a meaningful way. By taking a proactive and long-term look at what an area could be like 20 years into the future, Capital and Counties has been able to consider its role as urban custodians, as well as developers, in creating a place that will remain successful and thriving through the challenges that London will face in the next two or three decades.

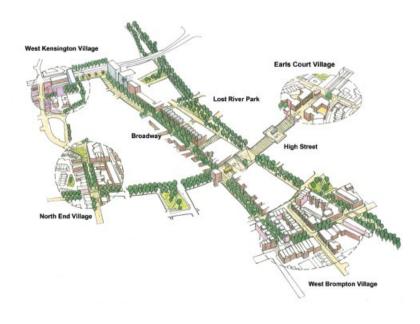
The advantages of this model of landownership are clear to see: an estate with interests in the economic return of an area, half a century or more down the line, takes decisions and produces plans that create places, not just buildings. At Earl's Court, the provision of housing, workplaces, and leisure, creative and community facilities have been central to the long-term success of this most recent of estates. By creating four villages with quite unique characters and carefully considered parks and squares, while providing up to 8,000 new homes, a similar process of stewardship of the urban realm is at work here as in the established estates of the 18th and 19th centuries. Place is created first and foremost, which gives a defined heart to a community, around which is gathered the workplaces, shops and

Earl's Court model photo showing Farrells' proposed masterplan.



Terry Farrell & Partners, Earl's Court
Masterplan, London, 2011
Farrells' masterplan for Earl's Court in context.

Farrells' vision for Earl's Court – 'Four Villages and a High Street'.



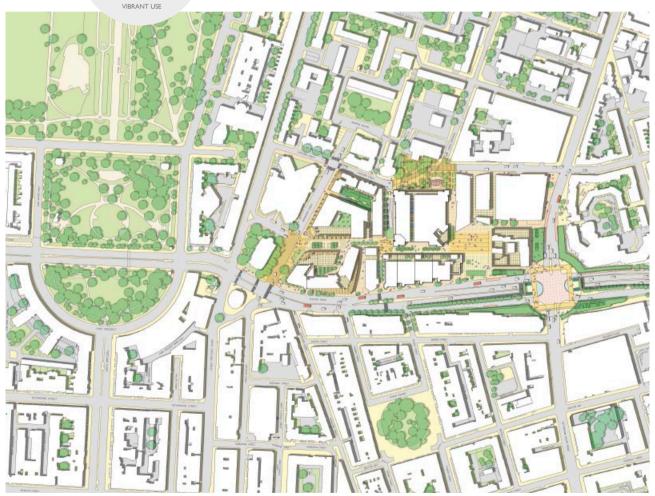
Terry Farrell & Partners, Regent's Place, London, 2010
Farrells' masterplan for Regent's Place in the West End of London.

homes that make a community flourish. By thinking decades into the future, and providing for social changes, Capital and Counties is working to make a place that is a home for both residents and businesses for years, not only in the short term. Like the estates of west-central London, this land along the banks of the lost river 'Counters Creek' has made the progression from agriculture to urbiculture and, through urban stewardship, is being brought back as an established place in the city. Rather than trying to build a place in and of itself, the masterplan Farrells has created seeks to draw on the styles and typologies of existing communities, and integrate them; through this approach their potential can be developed, ensuring that the masterplan remains sympathetic to the local area.

Stewardship requires an understanding of the context that one's land sits in, and an understanding of the position of that

10,000

NUMBER OF WORKERS EACH WEEK IN REGENT'S PLACE, A CUT-OFF AREA NOW RETURNED TO ACTIVE AND



At Regent's Place in the West End, British Land has guided the development of this section of London for 25 years, and has a long-term commitment to the continued success of this location as a newly emerging place for work, leisure and trade. place within the overall fabric of the city. At Regent's Place in the West End, British Land has guided the development of this section of London for 25 years, and has a long-term commitment to the continued success of this location as a newly emerging place for work, leisure and trade. The work of British Land has seen a previously cut-off section of Central London, home to over 10,000 workers during the week, returned to active and vibrant use. It is positioned to the north of the Euston Road and adjacent to Regents Park, and Farrells' work in advising and establishing an understanding of the situation of the land in historical and contemporary contexts has been key to its current success. Through analysing the relationship of the area to the adjacent West End and Fitzrovia, and careful consideration of the failures in the past to manage pedestrian and traffic flows at the Euston Circus junction with Tottenham Court Road, British Land has been able to influence and stimulate the growth of a new urban place. Large landowners, through their long-term commitment to the establishment of high-value real estate, are recognised as leading contributors to the sustainable urban development of the capital. Organisations such as British Land have won awards for built environment and biodiversity from champions of such causes as the Guardian newspaper, and provide excellent examples of how to holistically incorporate the very real agendas of the future into successful business models of land stewardship. Farrells' engagement comes from an approach to the city that sees the organisation of London as based on a pattern of emergent, contextually led planning, as opposed to object-led design. As at Marylebone, where the high street is held up as one of Britain's finest, certainly in terms of its urban qualities and extraordinary mix of uses, so the establishment of high-quality places is key in

Farrells' commercial buildings for 10 and 20 Triton Street, Regent's Place.

contemporary manifestations of a traditional form.

From the first Great Estates of the Crown, through the agricultural-to-urbicultural estates of Howard de Walden, Portman, Grosvenor and others, to the new estates of corporate landowners, a historical continuity exists in the shaping of London through these enlightened custodians of our urban realm. The careful cultivation from an agricultural asset, where crops were planted and nurtured, to an urban one where houses, offices, churches, pubs and all manner of buildings have been sown, cared for and managed over long periods of time, has bequeathed London a unique and internationally significant model for growing our cities. These active, vibrant and dense neighbourhoods are essentially place-based developments whose long-termism is central to their success, and can provide a way to renurture overlooked and underused areas of the capital. As is being seen at King's Cross with the developers Argent, through constructing human-scale places significant organisations can be attracted to settle an area, drawing in associated residents, culture and business. But these require an investment that is long term, committed and able to see the emergence of value, in both assets and cultural capital, decades down the line. The Great Estates of London have proven the benefit of investing in an urban future, and have shaped the capital in a unique and exemplary manner. The challenge for the future of London is to ensure local authorities and other landowners adopt the same approach to the stewardship of the city's urban realm. D

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Through far-sighted stewardship and investment in the public realm, British Land has been able to stimulate growth in a previously isolated section of Central London.



